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Charlotte Melin
University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, melin005@umn.edu

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Abstract

This essay considers German 'Naturlyrik' in terms of factors contributing to the mid-century emergence of political ecopoetry and 21st-century post-pastoral register. Cold War aesthetic experimentation connected with environmental concerns as poets, anthologists, and scholars bridged ideological differences by acknowledging shared values in relation to nature and environment. Material ecocriticism theory provides insight into how during the Cold War the lyric genre became the first to reclaim nature as a place of refuge, then protested the specter of an uninhabitable world, and eventually responded to humanly shaped nature. Work by poets Hans-Jürgen Heise, Peter Huchel, Wulf Kirsten, Ulrike Almut Sandig, and others is discussed.

Keywords

German poetry, nature, material ecocriticism, Cold War

Cold War Nature: Transforming German Poetry

Charlotte Melin
University of Minnesota

In 1961, the year construction of the Berlin Wall began, Hans-Jürgen Heise published his debut poetry collection *Vorboten einer neuen Steppe* 'Harbingers of a New Steppe.' For Heise and many postwar German poets, artistic breakthrough coincided with turning points in Cold War history, in part for reasons having to do with its pervasive impact on human relationships with nature. The collection opens with a dedicatory text that registers the loss of nature that has occurred: "Gestern haben wir / die letzten Wölfe geschossen. / Jetzt / ist die Wildnis für immer besiegt" (7) 'Yesterday we shot / the last wolves. / Now / wilderness has been conquered forever.'[1] A subsequent untitled poem then registers the creation of a landscape radically altered by humans:

> Sie ebnen die Gärten ein
> und fangen den Wind (diese Dinge
> werden nicht länger gebraucht).
>
> Stattdessen installieren sie
> eine bessere Landschaft:
> mit Wiesen aus Blech. (*Vorboten* 18)
>
> They level the gardens out
> and capture the wind (these things
> are no longer needed).
>
> In their place they install
> a better landscape:
> with meadows of sheet metal.

The laconic tone conveys the detachment of the observer from nature rather than the sentimentality of a conventional nature poet. How and why the sheet metal meadows came about is unexplained, but for readers of the time the scene surely would have invoked the kind of rubble-filled, postwar landscapes documented in the photographs of Friedrich Seidenstücker in which, for example, the *Tiergarten* park in Berlin has become a wasteland watched over by a scarred lone statue, with trees stripped bare and muddy tracts stretching to the horizon. Meanwhile, this poem's description (and references in others to crowded cities, asphalt surfaces, and skies crossed by planes) seems also to anticipate the contemporary

Industrienatur 'industrial nature' landscapes that Caitlin DeSilvey and others explore (110).

With such *Wiesen aus Blech* pervasive since the Cold War, nature's transformation has had important consequences for the lyric genre. For German poets, defining intersections of history and culture motivate a shift from pastoral nature poetry to a post-pastoral idiom, and they intensify its impact. Poems function as a form of discourse that is uniquely sensitive to matters of materialism, scale, and audience; moreover they consider conditions that deeply concern ecocriticism today. What interests me about these tendencies in postwar German poetry—which has been burdened with expectations about its aesthetic authority since the mid-twentieth century—is the ability of the lyric genre to register awareness of the changing natural world and of the necessity to come to terms with environmental challenges. Traits associated with what I call "Cold War nature" include at the outset complacent nostalgia for a *heile Welt* 'intact world,' a concern with positioning poetry as pastoral and isolated in the aesthetic realm, and a willingness to subordinate nature to confrontational political ideologies. Yet Cold War nature in its later iteration also gives rise to poems that display heightened awareness of species vulnerability, appreciation for experimental literary forms, and resistance to binary world views that drive toward apocalyptic outcomes. Poems that address Cold War nature internalize a sense of ethical responsibility connected to environment, reveal the difficulty of reconciling local and global perspectives, and invite our involvement.

In retrospect, Cold War era debates about artistic autonomy, representational capacities of poetic language, and political ideologies connect with emerging transnational ecological awareness that regards human agency with ever-greater circumspection and problematizes the contemplation of "natural" phenomena. Ecocritical theory of the twenty-first century helps us appreciate those tendencies. From this perspective, Heise's work and that of other poets is littered with human-created things that are "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans," which Timothy Morton proposes to define conceptually as hyperobjects (*Hyperobjects* 1). Meanwhile at the opposite end of the physical scale, the poetry presents us with gritty, natural details that the emerging theory of material ecocriticism helps explain by drawing attention to nonhuman substances, processes, and agency (Iovino, et al. 1-2). While these critical perspectives were unavailable in the 1960s, they are useful for explaining what we encounter in poetry, anthologies, and scholarly debates of the postwar era. Reading postwar German nature poetry through the lens of current environmental humanities discourse, it seems necessary to arrive at a more charitable assessment of its sentimental forms of nature poetry as the forerunner to post-pastoral poetics that engage with fully ecological perspectives.

For the lyric genre, as for any form of literature or art, aesthetic choice is not simply a matter of philosophical distinctions between idealized Romantic conceptions of nature and a bleak contemporary world of man-made objects. Poetry itself is both a cultural artefact and living art form, and is thus invested simultaneously in the preservation of past forms and the creation of new modes of expression. Traditionally we associate lyric poetry with nature, be it imaginatively controlled pastoral settings or untamed wilderness, and we expect to encounter ekphrasis and familiar forms of symbolism. The post-pastoral realities of the Anthropocene and hyperobjects pose a conceptual challenge to those assumptions by disrupting conventions of poetic self-containment, formal symmetry, and aesthetic pleasure, as Axel Goodbody compellingly argues in tracing the historical trajectory in German literature that runs from nature poetry to "poetry of the Anthropocene" ("German Ecopoetry" 263).

Taking Heise's work as a starting point, we might ask whether it gives witness to the demise of *Naturlyrik* 'nature poetry' altogether. Heise's prescience in registering human impact on the environment situates his work as one of the first in a trickle of poems in what would ultimately result in a stream of *Ökolyrik* 'ecopoetry' and even later to poems in the post-pastoral idiom.[2] What distinguishes his poetry is its spare detail and frankness, qualities mirrored by the cover image for the volume in which it appears. Emphasizing this aesthetic, the jacket illustration for *Vorboten einer neuen Steppe* is a black geometric figure rendered by Hans Arp, a shape that declares the book to be decidedly modern. Like hyperobjects that are both present and not there, as Morton argues in *The Ecological Thought* (2010), this two-dimensional study of form and negative space teases our imaginations with its abstraction.

In the context of German poetry (a medium keenly attuned to the discourses and debates of its time), the description Heise supplies of the landscape of sheet metal meadows is remarkable for its panoramic evocation of larger threats to humanity, which runs counter to an aesthetic of *Momentaufnahme* 'shot of the moment' that was emerging in German poetry more generally (Melin 88). Poetic *Momentaufnahme* has an affinity to photography that allows for precise, almost scientific focus on details similar to what occurs in a still life, while what Heise offers the reader is an expansive scene more akin to what viewers encounter in Seidenstücker's photographic series. The poem conveys a larger sense of anthropogenic transformation of the landscape. Aligning Heise's approach with Morton's account of hyperobjects, we can bring the differences between the aesthetics of *Momentaufnahme* and hyperobjects into sharper focus. Morton diagnoses the complicity of capitalism in the proliferation of non-degradable hyperobject substances: "Materials from humble Styrofoam to terrifying plutonium will far outlast current social and biological forms" (*The Ecological Thought* 130).

Heise invites readers to imagine that gardens and the wind can be carelessly discarded.

One hyperobject, as Morton explains, is the "thin layer of radioactive materials, deposited since 1945" that parallels the line of coal soot deposited since the industrial revolution (*The Ecological Thought* 4-5). This physical trace coincides with the start of what scientists sometimes call the "Great Acceleration," which took off with the boom in postwar consumerism (the *Wirtschaftswunder* or 'economic miracle') at the start of the Cold War—all the backdrop for Heise's slim volume of poetry. Fraught as it was with paradoxes like MAD, the political military doctrine of "mutually assured destruction" intended to ensure peace among the superpowers, the Cold War era reshaped nature and produced a world of hyperobjects that operates on a vast, distributed scale. Meditating on the philosophical significance of these asymmetries, Morton observes that "hyperobjects vividly demonstrate how things do not coincide with their appearance" (*Hyperobjects* 174).

Material ecocritism, on the other hand, offers theoretical grounding for interpreting such landscapes by reading the dynamic physical world itself in terms of "the emergent nature of the world's phenomena, the awareness that we inhabit a dimension criss-crossed by vibrant forces that hybridize human and nonhuman matters" (Iovino, et al. 5). From a twenty-first-century vantage point, it should be obvious why the lyric genre is compelled to undergo a paradigm shift in the face of dramatic change in the natural world, since we now understand that those environmental changes are not isolated, but rather connected to the larger system of how we inhabit place in very physical ways. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann define material ecocriticism as theory that has the capacity to reveal the semiotic, reciprocal interactions of the physical world and human culture as these interactions become visible in language—in other words, this approach decisively turns attention to how matter itself manifests forces of agency. As they explain,

> Material ecocriticism, in this broad framework, is the study of the way material forms—bodies, things, elements, toxic substances, chemicals, organic and inorganic matter, landscapes, and biological entities—intra-act with each other and with the human dimension, producing configurations of meaning and discourses that we can interpret as stories. (7)

Although poetry tells stories differently than narrative texts do, it also produces textured descriptions that emphatically make meaning through detail. Its discourses constantly evolve, both individually and collectively through the work of poets. Nonetheless, the manner in which such aesthetic transformations occur in German poetry is profoundly complicated, leading Goodbody to conclude that

Anthropocene poetry deserves special attention, given its connections to and departures from tradition ("Naturlyrik" 303).

Previous literary scholarship has emphasized the rejection of inherited, apolitical forms of *Naturlyrik* after 1945 and considered the emergence of politicized *Ökolyrik* as largely a separate development. Upon further examination, however, it becomes apparent that the Cold War ushered in experimentation with the poetic register that alternated between synthesis and disruption. This dynamic unfolds in individual poems, programmatic anthologies, and critical debates about *Naturlyrik* that positioned the lyric genre for fundamental change. Consequently, my project in this essay lies in revisiting these Cold War poetic discourses to discern what they tell us about the evolving relationship between humans and nature. The overall trajectory of the lyric genre that I want to follow is an evolution that made it first a vehicle for temporarily reclaiming nature's remnants as a place of refuge, then for protesting the specter of what might become an uninhabitable world, and eventually for developing nuanced ways of responding to humanly shaped nature as a central element.

Nature Poetry Anthologies: From Conservation to Cultural Change

In the immediate postwar years, nature poetry was a surprisingly dominant mode of public expression, in part because German literature was a highly destabilized literary system. Easy to produce by anyone under conditions of scarce resources, popular due to its perceived accessibility, and comfortingly familiar, German *Naturlyrik* carried with it a long tradition and ostensible cultural prestige. Strongly indebted to the poetic legacies of Goethe and the Romantic tradition, *Naturlyrik* had, however, unfortunately become associated with conservative literary traditions and trivial literature in the first half of the twentieth century. During the Fascist period (1933-1945), ideology further reduced its aesthetic potential by subordinating it to territorial patriotism. As Theodor W. Adorno cautions in the *Ästhetische Theorie* (*Aesthetic Theory*), the human tendency is to perceive nature only in terms of how we ourselves comfortably relate to it. This leads Adorno to conclude that people cannot appreciate nature's aesthetic beauty when they live an agrarian way of life, because it sets a precondition for feelings for the land that generates fears about uncontrolled nature (102-03). Still, he concludes that these feelings need not lead to a rejection of proximity to nature. Clearly, familiarity with the natural world is required to engage in reflection about it, but physical proximity to nature per se in the absence of writerly craft is not sufficient to generate poiesis that results in enduring *Naturlyrik*. Overproduced and associated with provincial agrarianism, nature poetry after the war was a devalued cultural artefact, although it continued to thrive.

Burdened with that legacy, postwar *heile Welt* poetry was regarded by many younger writers as simplistic and accordingly decried by Hans Magnus Enzensberger and others as sentimental mediocrity ("In Search" 336-37). While a few poets like Wilhelm Lehmann, Günter Eich, Karl Krolow, Johannes Bobrowski, and Peter Huchel pursued more vital forms of nature poetry, these efforts were largely eclipsed by avant-garde experiments with modernism, particularly in the West. Yet the best *Naturlyrik* practitioners on both sides of occupied Europe were fully aware of such international trends and would surely have embraced the point made by Ursula Heukenkamp (one of the foremost authorities on German nature poetry and East German literature in particular) that a poetic image of nature paradoxically does not depend either on the direct experience or the capacity for feelings of nature of the poet (*Die Sprache* 12). Poems about nature, in other words, need to be more than mere phenological observation of ephemeral things—they required the poetic autonomy and the aura of significance that has been described by Gernot Böhme. The point on which Adorno, Heukenkamp, and Böhme agree—and where contemporary ecocritics like Morton, Iovino, and Oppermann diverge—is the assumption that representation is enhanced and legitimated by aesthetic distance from nature, however that is defined. Material ecocriticism offers a significantly new way to conceive of proximity to nature in terms of subtle forms of agency rather than mere nostalgia for the decoratively pastoral, since it foregrounds the underlying semiotic significance of physical phenomenon in poetic texts.

This question of proximity to nature surfaces surprisingly often in early Cold War discussions about mimesis and symbolism. A salient example of the debate appears in the critique the poet Wilhelm Lehmann levels at Peter Huchel in a 1964 essay. One of the most important German nature poets of the twentieth century, Lehmann strenuously objected to what he regarded as casual historical references and imprecise lyricized subject matter in the work of Huchel. Lehmann instructed that nature poems should cultivate *Anschaulichkeit* 'clarity' achieved through *die sinnliche Nähe ihres Gegenstandes* ("Maß" 34) 'sensory proximity of its subject matter.' Lehmann's insistence on visual detail assumes proximity to be necessary for establishing symmetry between physical objects, symbolic meaning, and pathos. Here Lehmann finds Huchel wanting as compared with Paul Celan. Indeed, Celan possessed a vast knowledge of flora and fauna that often surfaced in his poems. Yet Lehmann's *Anschaulichkeit* (a subjective category) restricts *Naturlyrik* to mimetic conventions that did not challenge the Romantic idealization of the natural world in the way that material ecocriticism encourages us to do and thus overlooks important elements in Huchel's writerly practice.

Despite the negative conclusions Lehmann reached, Huchel's poetic process did involve minute observation of nature, especially a striving in his early poetry for a combination of sensory perception and mysticism (Ahrens 68). In a

memoir essay about Huchel, Lutz Seiler describes a notebook he received from Huchel's library, comprised of double sided pages crammed with a hieroglyphic register of metaphors and images that he could draw on when producing poems (88). It catalogues an extensive collection of details about natural phenomena—seasons, wildlife of all kinds, birds, fish, water, insects, landscapes, and the like, in an attempt to capture the essence of the natural world in language (Seiler 89). While this phenological and rather Linnean approach to artistic process is idiosyncratic to Huchel and slants toward anthropomorphism, as early as the late 1950s, poetry anthologies and critical discourses began to reclaim a position for *Naturlyrik* as a privileged form of expression grounded in the integrity of artistic process.

Meanwhile, initial responses to Cold War tensions worked out a role for nature poetry that again placed it squarely in the service of political ideology. As the writer and literary critic Hans Mayer later quipped in a 1967 lecture, it was understood that starlings would sing more beautifully under Socialism (380). East/West tensions are thus particularly noticeable in an early pan-German anthology *Deutsche Stimmen 1956* (Bruns; 'German Voices 1956') published in Stuttgart (Federal Republic of Germany [FRG]) under a copyright held by the Mitteldeutscher Verlag in Halle/Saale (German Democratic Republic [GDR]). The collection intersperses short prose fiction with poems that tacitly function as political-historical reflections wishfully advocating a resolution of tensions. Transcending the Cold War geographical divisions, its authors proposed alternatives to East/West confrontation by means of poems in which nature and the non-human function as a cipher for the breakdown in human communications.

Hanna Stephan's "Gefangene Dohle" (Bruns 117-18; 'Captive Jackdaw') tells the story of a rescued bird whose language humans do not understand and its subsequent release into the wild, where it will undoubtedly perish. Walter Bauer in "Kennst du das Wort nicht?" (Bruns 172; 'Do You Not Know the Word?') depicts an encounter between enemy soldiers in a forest clearing, where the poet imagines foes laying down their arms in a neutral zone of nature once they recognize their common humanity. In a third poem, Wolfgang Weyrauch's "Die japanischen Fischer" (Bruns 264; 'The Japanese Fishermen'), the consequences of nuclear testing on the Bikini Atoll are addressed. The poet becomes the voice for the inhabitants and devastated nature. Anaphora intensifies his protest, which culminates in a warning in the penultimate stanza:

> Ich schreibe von der grünen Plage,
> ich stelle Fragen, stelle Dich
> zur Rede, laß mich nicht im Stich,
> ich schreibe wie am Jüngsten Tage. (Bruns 264)

I write about the green plague,
I ask the question, confront you,
do not abandon me,
I write as if on the day of judgement.

Here, as in the other examples, what occurs in nature is seen to mirror human conflicts. The collateral damage surrounding Bikini becomes by proxy the apocalyptic scenario posed by the Cold War.[3]

In another anthology from the time, *Anthologie 56* (Gerlach; 'Anthology 56'), the East German poet Paul Wiens contemplates the potentially dire consequences of the Cold War for the entire earth. A writer who came of age during World War II, Wiens ponders in the poem "Vermächtnis" ('Legacy') how little will exist after the next conflict:

Wenn sich die letzten Staaten tödlich reiben,
was wird von Land und Leuten übrigbleiben?
Ach, schwarze Wogen himmelgroß,
die auf die Städte schlagen . . .
Wer wird die letzte Geschichte schreiben?
Wer wird zu Grabe tragen
den armen Erdenkloß? (Gerlach 154)

When the last states grate themselves down,
what will remain of land and people?
Alas, black billows vast as the heavens
that pound the cities . . .
Who will write the last history?
Who will carry to the grave
the earth's poor clod?

Such a text testifies to the capacity of poets to imagine apocalyptic futures by understanding the past. The phrase *die letzte Geschichte schreiben* 'write the last history' registers the role of history and writing in shaping communal consciousness. From the perspective of twenty-first-century ecocriticism, Wiens anticipates the notion of hyperobjects—the decimated landscape that makes clear that war and environmental catastrophe are equivalent. Moreover, that landscape resonates powerfully with Rob Nixon's notion of how the "slow violence" of war and pollution impacts people and cultures.

By the mid-1960s, appeals to universalisms replaced these kinds of dramatized scenes with a new rhetoric justifying care for the environment. In the 1965 nature poetry anthology *Zwischen Wäldern und Flüssen* ('Between Forests

and Rivers'), editor and poet Heinz Czechowski seeks to bridge the chasm between aesthetic projects and social concerns. Likely modelling his project on the influential 1960 anthology *Museum der modernen Poesie* ('Museum of Modern Poetry') edited by Enzensberger, Czechowski acknowledges in his introduction that anthologies have programmatic functions in so far as they establish priorities with respect to subject matter, aesthetic innovation, and relationships to readers and society.[4] Comparing nature and love poetry, Czechowski asserts that such writing is universally fundamental, indeed important for rethinking the relationship of humans in society to their environment or *Umwelt* (9). The insertion of the term *Umwelt* into this account is noteworthy, because it marks Czechowski's vision as moving beyond the pristine and pastoral nature prized by Romanticism. The claims he makes on behalf of the lyric genre cast it as a vehicle for all human understanding. Notwithstanding the enduring popularity of nature poetry, however, by 1965 it would have been difficult to read this description without questioning its attempt to gloss over the grim realities of the Cold War and the constraints both communist and capitalist ideology imposed on artistic freedom.

Yet already then, alternate concepts for nature poetry writing had begun to emerge under the banner of overt political engagement. While the polarizing effects of ideological divisions are evident, the first glimmers of transnationalism surface in the poetic discourses of East and West, with *Naturlyrik* playing a surprisingly important role in promoting consensus and care for the environment. Considering the emergence of *Ökolyrik* in East and West, Goodbody, the preeminent scholar in this domain, concludes that in the GDR, "up to the late 1970s poets were freer than prose writers to treat ecological issues, perhaps because they have traditionally championed the non-utilitarian, or even the irrational, perhaps also because their audiences and possible impact were limited" ("Deutsche Ökolyrik" 392). Within this space, according to Goodbody, freedom of expression and aesthetic experimentation flourished provisionally.

Indicative of this trend is the poet Günter Kunert, who raised concerns about technology's potential to end human life in the context of a literary debate in 1966, as scholar David Bathrick points out. Acknowledging that environmental issues rarely surfaced in early GDR literary opposition, Bathrick credits Kunert with reclaiming poetry's capacity to agitate. Kunert's critique of technological advancement was sharply attacked for parting ways with socialist enthusiasm for progress and he left the GDR in 1979 (Bathrick 150). Nonetheless, his direct comparison between Auschwitz and Hiroshima marshals a humanitarian argument for environmental protection that resonates to this day.

Indeed, the longer the Cold War persisted, the more poets and scholars in the East and West found ways to bridge political differences by articulating common values in relation to nature and the environment. Paradoxically, hardline Cold War thinking itself seems to have catalyzed doubt about dichotomous

perspectives. However marginal nature poetry was to actual public and political debates, it had become a platform for rapprochement by the early 1980s, judging from statements by writers, scholars, and anthologists.

One such example from this period is Heukenkamp's 1982 essay collection *Die Sprache der schönen Natur* ('The Language of Beautiful Nature'), which focuses on shifts in representations of nature from images of the beautiful to landscapes fusing nature with the industrial and urban. Here the meta-history of the genre resists ideological claims, allowing for a reassertion of aesthetic priorities. Heukenkamp's skilled readings trace the association of nature with the sublime as she attends closely to the ways in which poetic representation has always been highly constructed, rather than based in the actual experience of nature per se (12). Keeping in mind her position as a GDR scholar, we can easily recognize the Cold War overtones in Heukenkamp's advocacy of "post-bourgeois" nature poetry that underlie her arguments about fraught human/non-human relationships (180-81). The ideological critique of materialism motivating this discussion leads Heukenkamp to conclude that nature and materialism cannot be reconciled, but it also paves the way for the emergence of thinking about nature as a culturally constructed entity.

In the West, where discussions could engage more openly with ecological issues, *Ökolyrik* had already begun to emerge. In a 1981 essay, Hiltrud Gnüg charts shifting depictions of nature from the eighteenth to mid-twentieth century, beginning with Goethe. To her credit, Gnüg recognizes that in many cases what passes as *Naturlyrik* merely reaffirms the human subjugation of nature, as in Bertolt Brecht's famous line about *Gespräch über Bäume* 'conversation about trees.' Rather than confining herself to a thematic treatment of poems illustrating the degradation of nature through industrialization, Gnüg confronts the conceptual and creative limitations imposed by both utopian and dystopian representations of it. Gnüg acknowledges that "Agitprop" (explicitly political poetry) does no better in engaging with environmental challenges than traditional *Naturlyrik*, because it consistently fails to engage with science and to challenge representational practices (282). Thus, she proposes the incorporation of new subject matter seemingly unsuited to the lyric genre—matters like pollution, landscape destruction, and species loss that redirect poetry about nature to *Industrienatur* and post-pastoral register.

But the post-pastoral was a category that did not yet exist, nor had hyperobjects and material ecocritism appeared on the horizon, and so the transformation occurring in the lyric genre continued to be discussed in terms of nature poetry traditions, rather than a paradigm shift. Analyzing the similarity of developments in the East and West, Goodbody explains *Ökolyrik* as a transnational phenomenon that has its roots in Romanticism. "Environmental poetry," he asserts, "is more than a mere document of social and political culture. It goes beyond the

narrowly mimetic depiction of landscapes, polemic triteness and subservience of art to political interest" ("Deutsche Ökolyrik" 376). In taking stock of the contributions made by German thinkers to self-conscious ecological awareness, Goodbody points to asynchronous patterns of environmentalism in the FRG and GDR that revolved around differentiated concerns about the potential impact of nuclear destruction, pollution issues, and resource limitations. He sees this trend as beginning in poetry of the 1970s with essentially conservative concerns about the preservation of nature, noting that only later did it take on emancipatory dimensions (394-95), which allowed it to play a pivotal role in social activism that led to the *Wende*, i.e., the turn of events in 1989 (392).

Goodbody's analysis centers on a comparison of four anthologies of the 1980s. Leaving aside one of his examples, the strictly GDR anthology *Die eigene Stimme* (Heukenkamp, et al.; 'One's Own Voice'), the most striking features of the others are their pan-German scope, broad aesthetic program, and historical sweep. Characteristic of these three—*Moderne deutsche Naturlyrik* (Marsch; 'Modern Nature Poetry'), *Im Gewitter der Geraden* (Mayer-Tasch, et al.; 'In the Storm of Straight Lines'), and *Die Erde will ein freies Geleit* (Borman; 'The Earth Wants Safe Passage'), all published in the West and branded as nature poetry collections—is their embrace of *Naturlyrik* as a medium with cultural cachet. Anthologies like these had an instrumental purpose: under the polarized political ideologies of the Cold War, they function as artefacts used to make a special case for the artistic achievements of the East, though skilled editors could find ways to subvert that message.[5]

In an additional anthology, the 1979 collection *Veränderte Landschaft* ('Changed Landscape') edited by the poet Wulf Kirsten, there is a striking juxtaposition of poems depicting war-ravaged landscapes with others about the transformation of nature into a *Friedhof der Zivilisation* 'graveyard of civilization,' to quote poet Ulrich Berkes (62). Here we encounter the framework I proposed at the outset that pivots our view from Seidenstücker's photographic panoramas to *Industrienatur* landscapes. Clearly intended to have a powerful impact, the juxtaposition signals yet another decisive shift as well. Though firmly situated in the GDR, *Veränderte Landschaft* gives indication of the emergence of transnational environmental awareness. Kirsten uses his editorial space to affirm that nature and nature poetry have become a place of refuge, because they are part of a *Humanisierungsprozeß* 'humanizing process,' meaning that they serve an essential compensatory aesthetic function (107). His unusual choice of the term *Humanisierungsprozeß* to justify the value of nature poetry points to origins for environmental thinking before Romanticism—the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge, social equality, and tolerance. For the environment, however, the legacy of the Enlightenment has been profoundly ambiguous. As Amita Ghosh remarks, Enlightenment notions of human freedom

and agency, which the political divides of the Cold War complicity advanced, are profoundly challenged by the magnitude of climate change (119).

With an essay entitled "Das Dorf in der Stadt—die Stadt im Dorf" 'The Village in the City—the City in the Village' from 1980, Heise (who had by then emigrated from East to West) calls out as obvious the fact that both capitalist consumerism and communism were catapulting the Earth toward crisis (*Natur* 8). Here Heise faults Marxism for the uncritical adoption of the Enlightenment legacy of rationalism and naïve, Rousseauian views about nature (17). In related essays, he meanwhile takes stock of the marginalization of *Naturlyrik* in the West, pointing out that its prestige in the East was surprisingly reinforced through less predictable connections with Expressionism (91).

Returning now to our consideration of Cold War nature as a unique discourse, we should remember that many conditions for literary production and environmental activism changed with the *Wende*. Literary scholars stressed more emphatically the common heritage of nature poetry in East and West. Strident *Ökolyrik* lost its appeal as poets began working toward aesthetically hybrid forms and other media grew in importance. Uninhabitable swaths of the Iron Curtain turned into European Green Belt initiatives that aspire to connect nature reserves stretching from the Barents to the Mediterranean, Adriatic, and Black Seas.[6] The lyric genre, and especially nature poetry, once again became an aesthetic medium that seemed to eschew political engagement. A vast proliferation of poetic styles resulted, but the lyric genre grew more marginalized than ever.[7] Looking back, we can see that the role anthologies played in constructing Cold War attitudes about nature and the environment in a sense repeats the history of the initial emergence of the lyrical poem in European and Anglo-American literary traditions, which coincided with the rise of nation states (Jackson). As Anne Ferry emphasizes with respect to Anglo-American writing in *Tradition and the Individual Poem* (2001), the bucolic "pastoral balance" we associate with lyric poetry reflected in very fundamental ways an intentionally aestheticised culture and its values (119). Yet today we live in a world where pastoral balance is no longer tenable, not even in the thematically conceived anti-pastoral and post-pastoral modes that Terry Gifford recognizes as its alternative.

Creating a New Post-pastoral Poetry of Witness

The threats to humans represented by Hiroshima, the Holocaust, and environmental catastrophe, which surface in German poetry almost immediately after 1945, continue to animate it in increasingly varied form. True, while complacency in the face of environmental change would be unthinkable, the fragile medium of *Naturlyrik* seems poorly matched to the task of confronting an experience of unnatural "nature" for which no language seem adequate. Penned for

other reasons, Adorno's famous words about the impossibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz underscore the gravity of challenges to humanity and might well admonish us to confront environmental crisis today ("Kulturkritik" 31).

How poetry might respond to the challenge issued by Adorno has long been in question, but the lyric genre inhabits a cultural space that affords speculation. The idealized and ecologically disconnected conception of nature articulated in 1950 by Werner Bergengruen in his poem "Die heile Welt" as a place where "Niemand kann die Welt verwunden, / nur die Schale wird geritzt" (Marsch 49) 'No one can wound the world / only the skin is scratched' has vanished from our present experience. It seems ironic now, too, that the generation of postwar German poets who initially worked to invent new forms for the lyric genre did so with the belief that 1945 was a 'zero hour' for the writing of *Kahlschlag* or 'clear cut' literature that represented a fresh start, oblivious of attendant environmental concerns (Brockmann 1-15, 206).

In a poem from December 1954, "Apokalypse" ('Apocalypse'), Dagmar Nick invokes the horrors of World War II to make vivid the threat posed by potential nuclear conflict. A poet speaking on behalf of future generations, she asks:

> Wer
> Wird die Toten begraben
> Auf dem Schlachtfeld Europa,
> Wer wird sie zählen
> Und wägen und sagen:
> Das waren Menschen? (Mayer-Tasch, et al. 228)
>
> Who
> Will bury the dead
> On the battlefield of Europe,
> Who will count them
> And weigh and say:
> Those were people?

Far ahead of her time and skeptical of rhetoric about the peacetime benefits of atomic power, Nick warns that "Aus den verwaisten Atommeilern / wird sich Verwesung ergießen / über die Erde" (228) 'From orphaned nuclear reactors / decay will pour out / over the earth.' However bleak the landscape appears, we see it from a human perspective and are not asked to notice non-human inhabitants, as contemporary ecocriticism prompts us to do, particularly through new materialism. The fact that Nick's poem comes to us from an anthology from the 1980s reveals much about lingering anthropocentric conventions.

While the anthologies discussed in this essay served to renew interest in nature poetry and created a venue for *Ökolyrik*, they often perpetuated a program that represented traditional canon more extensively than contemporary work. Even when they appeared, as in the collections by Marsch and Bormann, there seems to be a distinct editorial preference for familiar rhetorical forms. Both of these anthologies, for example, contain Erich Fried's "Neue Naturdichtung" ('New Nature Poetry') which cleverly refigures Brecht's internal conflict over whether to write about nature at all. As Fried laments in the poem "Tannen" 'fir trees':

> Wenn wir hinauskommen
> sind sie vielleicht schon gefällt
> und liegen astlos auf dem zerklüfteten Sandgrund (Marsch 179)
>
> When we come out
> they will perhaps already be felled
> lying branchless on the jagged sandy ground

Devoid of more specific references to flora and fauna that would make the landscape welcoming, the poem supplies a scene of clear cutting that can be taken as emblematic of human activity in the Anthropocene, yet it seems detached from palpable realities.

Similarly, Volker Braun's "Durchgearbeitete Landschaft" ('Worked through Landscape') becomes one of the most frequently anthologized postwar poems in collections of nature poetry by virtue of its inclusion in all three anthologies from the 1980s edited by Marsch, Bormann, and Mayer-Tasch. As Goodbody notes, Braun was paradoxically a proponent of the pioneering GDR spirit, taking a "Promethean approach" at odds with the preservation of nature ("Deutsche Ökolyrik" 389). The poem depicts the violent clearing of trees from land with heavy machinery to make space for a railway and man-made body of water. Braun, like proponents of massive geoengineering and extraction projects today, applauds these excavations as desirable and inevitable. The void created becomes the landscape of *Industrienatur*, or as Braun writes in another poem titled with a place name, "Landwüst," "Natürlich bleibt nichts. / Nichts bleibt natürlich" (Marsch 253) 'Naturally nothing remains. / Nothing remains natural.' After the end of the Cold War, when highly accomplished poets like Sarah Kirsch, Erika Burkart, and even Enzensberger revitalized nature poetry, cosmopolitan and post-pastoral perspectives finally broke free from tradition. Humanly reshaped urban paratactic landscapes of the kind Jürgen Egyptien observes in poems by Peter Waterhouse, along with settings layered with history, as in W. G. Sebald's *Nach der Natur* (*After Nature*), became intrinsic to the idiom used in the lyric genre to address environmental issues.

Poetry, after all, is not photographic representation, despite the affinities to that medium we have observed. While legacies of literary traditions, war, and political division prepared German poetry for the visual representation of environmental matters, the innate transformative capacities of the lyric genre depended on formal openness to materialisms, parataxis, and multi-sensory sources of inspiration that give it special attunement to the complex realities of the twenty-first century. In the recent poetry collection *Streumen* (2007, a location in Saxony), Ulrike Almut Sandig meditates on such matters in what she identifies as the "russenwald" 'russian woods,' a military zone:

> betreten verboten vermintes gebiet / heide
> fallbaum lichtung moosrand / krater rotwild
> leere dörfer / backsteinhallen erika. (*Streumen* 16)
>
> no trespassing land mines / heath
> barricade clearing moss fringe / crater red deer
> empty villages / brick halls heather. ("russian woods")

The off-limits area offers a space where the poet and others explore and sometimes encounter the foreign occupiers, their vehicles, and hardware equipment. When the military abandoned this site, the poet recalls, "wer das tat, kam lange nicht / wieder. wir warteten umsonst" (*Streumen* 16) 'whoever did that didn't come back for / a long time. we waited in vain' ("russian woods"). In that place, and in many other poems that dwell on the significance of deserted spaces, we again encounter Cold War nature in discourses oscillating from the local to the global and from material detritus to hyperobjects. Poetry, and especially *Naturlyrik* today, is a challenged medium, yet its textured observations present us with nothing less than radically speculative nature. What has developed is a post-pastoral idiom that meditates on the indelible and elusive traces of humanity in the landscape to create a poetry of witness.[8]

Notes

1. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

2. Reinhold Grimm argues that "Fremder Garten" from Enzensberger's debut collection *Verteidigung der Wölfe* (1957) is the first truly ecological poem written in German (172-73).

3. For a discussion of contemporaneous depictions of nuclear annihilation in German fiction, see Wolfgang Lückel.

4. Czechowski's discussion of the function of anthologies, rationale for thematic organization, and account of the tension between the provincial and the cosmopolitan echo the discourse of Enzensberger's afterword to his collection. That collection was known in the GDR, despite restrictions on the transport of print materials from the West. Illustrations for *Zwischen Wäldern und Flüssen*, line drawings of flowers and tree-adorned landscapes by Bärbel Jacobi, reinforce a conventional view of nature. By contrast, Marsch's anthology uses black and white woodcuts and graphics that are reminiscent of Expressionism in style.

5. Goodbody explains that editors of anthologies published in the West had to obtain permission to include works by GDR authors, thus it was necessary for him to use anthologies to compile a representative sample of work for his study ("Deutsche Ökolyrik" 386).

6. As Astrid Eckert notes about this space, "With the same biota often found on both sides of the fence, the Iron Curtain confirms a truism of environmental history: nature rarely respects man-made boundaries" (34).

7. See Hermann Korte (30-44), Ralph Buechler (168-95), and Jonas Torsten Krüger for example.

8. The term "poetry of witness" refers to a conception of poetry as an act of aesthetic resistance embodied in the title and contents of Carolyn Forché's anthology, *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*. For a discussion of an emerging contemporary poetics that emphasizes post-pastoral perspectives, see Daniel Falb, *Anthropozän* ('Anthropocene'). Additional examples of post-pastoral poetry may be found in the 2016 poetry anthology edited by Anja Bayer and Daniela Seel.

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